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How to cite:

Mansur, Saba Bahareen and Shrestha, Prithvi N. (2015). The EAP course design Quagmire – juggling the stakeholders' perceived needs. In: Shrestha, Prithvi ed. Current Developments in English for Academic and Specific Purposes: Local innovations and global perspectives. Reading: Garnet Education, pp. 93–113.

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

http://www.garneteducation.com/Book/777/Current_Developments_in_English_for_Academic_and_Specific_Purposes:_Local

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Please cite as:

Mansur, S.B. & Shrestha, P. (forthcoming). The EAP course design Quagmire – juggling the stakeholders’ perceived needs. In P. Shrestha ed. *Current Developments in English for Academic and Specific Purposes: Local innovations and global perspectives*. Reading: Garnet Education. ISBN: 978-1-78260-162-3.

The EAP course design quagmire: juggling the stakeholders’ perceived needs

Saba Bahareen Mansur, Department of Humanities, COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, Islamabad, Pakistan

sbahareen@comsats.edu.pk

Prithvi N. Shrestha, Department of Languages, The Open University, UK

Prithvi.Shrestha@open.ac.uk

Introduction

This chapter explores the views of the three main stakeholders of an ESP programme: administrators, English for Specific Purposes teachers and MBA students at a premiere Pakistani University, regarding MBA students’ English language needs. The COMSATS Institute of Information Technology (CIIT), Islamabad Campus, is the milieu of this study. These MBA students come from all around the country, especially from comparatively underprivileged areas. Students may not have had access to good schooling and may have had very limited exposure to the English language. A sizeable number of students have even obtained their bachelor’s degrees through distance learning programs.

While teaching Business Communication (a wide-angled English for Occupational Purposes course) to MBA students at CIIT for around a decade, the first author encounters challenges such as diverse educational backgrounds and English language proficiencies, therefore, she conducted a needs analysis study of the English Language needs of MBA students (Mansur, 2010a). This research had highlighted the need for an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course with a special focus to basic language skills. The results of which were communicated to the administrative personnel at

COMSATS then. However, the proposed EAP course was not made part of the scheme of MBA studies. The administration had showed an unwillingness to consider the inclusion of such a course in the scheme of studies of the MBA programme. Administrative red tape-ism including lengthy Board of studies and Board of Governors' approvals, lack of experts to defend the reasons for need of change in the curriculum were cited as reasons for not incorporating the EAP course in the four year scheme of studies of the MBA programme.

A few informal, small scale efforts were made to initiate English Language support system for students with limited English by the first author and like-minded teaching staff. These endeavours, could not sustain because of lack of administrative support as well as intense workload of the faculty members involved. Now a fresh effort in the same line is underway to establish an English language support system with the support of some of the administrators; it is hoped that these efforts will endure the test of time.

This research explores perspectives of COMSATS administrators, ESP teachers and MBA students on the English language needs of MBA students. It further tries to explore the strife caused by the administrative differences in opinion and outlook on the university's system that restrain it from bringing much needed change in the curriculum. In doing so the chapter also looks for a way forward, that is, a way to meet the English language needs of MBA students despite the disparity in the three respective standpoints. It also offers implications of this study to other global EAP contexts.

Literature review

The use of English as a medium of instruction for education (especially in higher education) has been on the rise in Non-native English speaking (NNS) countries particularly in Asia and Europe (see Gill & Kirkpatrick, 2012). This trend has made researchers and practitioners look into ways of facilitating NNS students' learning by providing English language support to students in the best possible way (see for example Hutchison & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hyland, 2006). According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 19) 'ESP should be seen as an approach to language teaching which is directed by specific and apparent

reasons for learning'. Therefore 'all decisions of content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning' (ibid).

If this is done in the context of Pakistani Higher education many problems being faced by students, faculty and administrators can be solved. Pakistan is 'a classic' cultural society (Mansoor, 2005). Students having different mother tongues have to study at higher education in English, the country's official language. For such students, English is a fourth or fifth or a foreign language (Shamim, 2008).

Despite the heavy doses of English in the undergraduate courses 'the results are abysmally low' in English subject (Abbass, 1998). Malik (1996) endorses the same view and expounds on it further by saying that the weak proficiency in the language has lowered the standard of performance at graduate and post-graduate levels where medium of instruction and examination is in English.

In Pakistan, although the awareness is gradually growing in many circles, English language teaching is, for the most part still 'a handmaiden of literary studies' and in the process of moving towards the notion that the teaching of language can with advantage be deliberately matched to the specific needs and purposes of the learner (Strevens, 1977, p.89).

Researchers like Abbass (1993) and Haque (1993) have long called upon the need of the introduction and use of communicative language teaching and curricula to help the learner meet their communicative needs. In the words of Tribble and Shamim (2006, p.32)

... the huge demand for English in the employment market and the relatively low levels of proficiency of graduates from public sector institutions of higher education in Pakistan.

A paradigm shift has started to take place in ELT at university level. ESP wide-angled courses attempting to work on all four skills under the head of communications skills were introduced (ibid) in place of English literature. ESP as a discipline, therefore, is still in its infancy in Pakistan. The demand of high levels of English language and communication skills is not an isolated event in this part of the world. Skills and English language proficiency required for both academics and professionals have become more

complex over the past decades (see Locker, 2003; Guffey, 2004; Stevens, 2004 & 2005; Flowerdew, 2008; Uzuner, 2008). More than ever before, the high demand of 'employability skills' (NCIHE, 1997) and the inclusion of visual and audio literacy into traditional literacies of discourse communities has complicated the demands on education for graduates.

These complex needs in the Pakistani context have not been explored at the higher education level. Hence, the 'awareness' of the reasons and needs of the students central to English for Specific Purposes course design has no research-based evidence although 'Needs Analysis' research has become a tool that is used and found to be very helpful in designing and meeting needs of students (West, 1994; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Zhu, 2004).

Needs Analysis, according to Lytle (1988), is an important part of any instructional programme design from the individual learner's perspective and can benefit teachers as well as students. Researchers argue (see Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991; Dudley-Evans, 1998; Savignon & Wang, 2003) that learner-centred approach to language learning, especially in ESP/EAP, is based on the premise that language teaching and learning programmes should be responsive to learners' needs.

Needs analysis instigates and steers EAP course design and development; it involves surveying students to collect data on their background and goals, wants, needs, linguistic and behavioural demands, and preferred learning/teaching strategies (Jasso-Aguilar, 1999). Students' needs assessment remains fundamental to EAP (Allison et al., 1994; Brinton et al., 1989; Dudley-Evans, 1998; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Jordan, 1997). It is the homogenizing part of any EAP course as it helps in defining the objectives and content of each course according to learners' needs in the target language and how learners are expected to perform in conforming to the norms and conventions of their academic disciplines.

The needs assessment should be considered as an on-going process designed to gather and analyse information about the target language needs of learners and see whether these requirements are being achieved. It also helps with planning learners' and the EAP

programme's future directions and making informed decisions (Purpura & King, 2003; Santopietro & Peyton, 1991).

The most significant question in relation to 'needs analysis' research is conceptualization of the term 'need'. Brindley (1989, p. 65) sees a distinction between various concepts of needs, such as between needs and wants and the ways by which the difference between these two is determined as a major source of ambiguity in the concept of language needs. Conversely, 'needs' can be seen as a measurable gap between the existing conditions and the desired future state (Berwick, 1989). Benesch (1996) posits 'needs' may be seen critically, that is, questioned and understood to provide room for reform rather than accepting the status quo.

According to Pratt (1980, p.79) 'needs assessment refers to an array of procedures for identifying and validating needs, and establishing priorities among them.' Zhu (2004) states that by analyzing the views of content teachers on English language needs of students, much can be found out about the needs of instruction and literacies required by the students to cope with their studies. According to Richards (2001, P. 54 as cited in Hyland 2003, p. 59):

In reality, needs reflect judgments and values and as a result are likely to be defined differently by different stakeholders with school administrators, government departments, parents, employers, teachers and learners themselves having different views.

Richards (2001) and Holmes and Celani (2006) suggest that needs be seen as unique characteristics of the educational context in which the studies are to take place. As students' needs vary in different contexts, only needs analysis and courses designed on the basis of this needs analysis can help students most effectively (Deutch, 2003). Brown (1995, p. 52) posits that '... multiple sources of information should be used in a needs analysis — although the specific combination appropriate for a given situation must be decided on the site by the needs analysts themselves.'

The studies using multiple methods to find out needs of business graduates around the world are quite few. As can be seen by a cursory scan of the journals of *Business Communication Quarterly* and *Journal of Business Communication*, dealing with the

interdisciplinary subject of business communication, of the past two decades reveal that, the focus of research has been on the following three strains:

- (i) The perceptions of teachers and students' of students' communication needs in terms of students' strengths and weaknesses in writing in comparison with real life business tasks (e.g. Bacha & Bahous, 2008; Epstein, 1999; Plutsky, 1996; Reinsch & Shelby, 1997);
- (ii) Quality and standard maintenance in business communication instruction in MBA programs (e.g. Bogert & Butt, 1996; Knight, 1999);
- (iii) Comparison and contrast between teachers and professionals' perceptions of different aspects of student writing (e.g. Laster & Russ, 2010; Alred, 2006; Zhu, 2004; Leonard & Gilsdorf, 1990; Seshadri & Theye, 2000); and
- (iv) Impact of different types of instructional techniques (e.g. team-teaching) on learning (e.g. Hotchradel, Long & Johnson, 2010; Grinols & Waller, 2010)

In addition, other studies have tried to look into English language needs of MBA students from angles different than taking perceptions of the stakeholders of the courses (see e.g. Bacha, 2001; Zhu, 2004; Loudermilk, 2007). Most of these studies have focused on writing skills. Zhu (2004) looks at the target needs of MBA students by analyzing writing tasks given to students at university. Loudermilk (2007) tries to show the highly complex nature of MBA essays whereas Bacha (2001) debates the pros and cons of different rating scales and ways of evaluating writing in EFL academic environments where English is used as the medium of instruction. Northcott (2001) uses an ethnographic approach to find out ways of making MBA lectures more interactive and effective. Basturkmen (1999) looks into the actual use of language in MBA seminars and the commonly used material in MBA EAP courses.

From the discussion above, it is evident a number of studies have delved into finding the perspectives of the students, subject teachers and faculty about the English Language needs of the students. However, few researchers have given even cursory mention of the administrative involvement and impact on ESP course design and implementation. In this connection, Tajino, James & Kijima (2005) call for meaningful collaboration between

ESP teachers, content teachers as well as institutional administrators using the comprehensive systems methodology to design effective EAP courses. Evans and Green (2007) mention the concern and changing perception of administration and teachers towards English literacy in Cantonese-speaking countries including Hong Kong. In contexts like these the change in the medium of instruction at secondary and tertiary levels has resulted in the proliferation of EAP courses.

Researchers like Helmer (2013) calls for a ‘rights analysis’ rather than ‘needs analysis’, taking on a pragmatic approach to EAP in line with views of Pennycook (1994, 1997), Belcher (2006), and Benesch (2001a, 2001b). Helmer asserts the need for being sensitive towards the socio-political, linguistic and cultural needs of the contexts (Benesch 2001a; Pennycook 2010; Norton & Toohey, 2004).

Despite a wide recognition of the dire need of students with limited English at higher education there have been almost no published needs auditing studies on Pakistani students. The recommendation of training teachers to conduct English language needs analysis is part of the report submitted to Higher Education Commission in 2006 entitled ‘Case Studies of Organization of Teaching of English in Public Sector Universities in Pakistan’ (Shamim et al., 2006). According to the same report (ibid) as well as research by others (Zafar, 2003 & 2009; Mansur 2010b) most teachers teaching ESP subjects are not trained to do so. Therefore, encouraging professional development of teachers teaching ESP can provide skills like conducting needs analysis research and aligning courses and material accordingly will help them.

The current study is exploratory in nature. In this chapter, we specifically examine the perceptions of university administration, ESP teachers and Pakistani MBA students regarding the students’ English language proficiency at a reputable University of Pakistan. It also attempts to find a way to cater to the identified needs. More specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What do the administrators think are the English language needs of the MBA students?
2. How do the administrators feel the ‘English language needs’ can be fulfilled?
3. What do the ESP teachers think about the English Language needs of the

- students?
4. How do the ESP teachers think these needs can be met?
 5. What are the students' views about their English Language needs?
 6. How do these views of the stakeholders help in finding a way to address the English Language needs of MBA students?

Problematisation of the context

National

Pakistan is a post-colonial state having a complex relationship (Mansoor, 2005; Mehboob, 2002) with English language. English is the official language of the country as well as the medium of instruction in higher education. The students that become part of the higher education, however, come from 'apartheid education systems' (see e.g. Shamim 2008; Siddiqui 2012): one stream has English as its medium of instruction while the other has Urdu or a regional language. Most prestigious jobs require high levels of proficiency in English language (Abbass 1993; Haque 1993; Shamim 2008; Mehboob 2009). This poses significant challenges to those students coming from Urdu or other language-medium education.

English language curricula at school and college level is based on literature and the teaching methodologies are confined to grammar translation and lectures (Malik 1996; Mansoor 2005; Siddiqui 2012). Most teachers teaching ESP subjects such as Business Communication, Communication skills and Functional English at higher education level hold Masters Degrees in English literature and are unaware of what ESP is (Shamim, 2006; Zafar 2003 & 2009; Mansur, 2010b).

Institutional

COMSATS Institute of Information Technology (CIIT) Islamabad is rather new (established in 1999 and receiving its charter in 2001) and yet a prestigious higher education institute of Pakistan with seven fully functional campuses across the country. It offers degree programmes in 32 subject areas. The Department of Management Sciences is one of the oldest and lucrative departments of CIIT. The department of Humanities was

established in 2010 although earlier it worked as a subsidiary of Management Sciences Department.

Research methodology

This study has used a mixed methods approach to find the perspectives of three different stakeholders regarding the English language needs of MBA students. The methods used are as follows:

1. Questionnaires: The first perspective takes into account the views of the MBA students using questionnaires.
2. Semi-structured interviews: The second perspective looks at the views of Administrators and ESP teachers teaching MBA students through interviews.
3. Reflective paper/auto-ethnography: The first author wrote an auto-ethnography recounting her experience in accordance with the research questions.

Quantitative method

Questionnaires

The MBA students of the first semester (sample of convenience) were taken as the sample group for this study. A questionnaire especially designed to learn about the English language needs was distributed among the students in their classes to be filled in.

The questionnaire mainly used Likert scale questions as its basis. The questionnaire designed was piloted initially with 50 students. As a result of the piloting, some questions were modified to increase comprehensibility and align the questions with the aims of the study. An open-ended question was added to the questionnaire to give students freedom to say what they wanted on the issue.

The refined questionnaire was given to a total of 137 students to complete. The data that the usable questionnaires yielded was inserted into SPSS (the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software for analysis. Thirty eight of these questionnaires were discarded as they were either not filled-in completely or the same option (e.g. option 'c') was chosen in all Likert scale questions.

Questions 1-5 of the questionnaire were about general bio-data of the students (i.e., mainly general demographics). Questions 6-12 were regarding the educational histories

of students. Questions were asked about the stream of schooling used (public or private); medium of instruction used in the schools/ colleges previously attended. The next questions all pertain to language skills used at university level. The amount of usage of language skills was enquired about in questions 13-17. Questions 18-21 dealt with problems students might have with individual language skills and their sub skill sets. Question 22 was regarding the mode of instruction preferred by students. Questions 23-24 were regarding the use of dictionary. Question 25 was an open-ended question asking for further comments from students.

Qualitative method

Semi structured interviews conducted with administrative personnel and ESP teachers

The interview schedules for the administrative personnel and ESP teachers were developed in line with the research questions and the background of the research questions as well as the administrative constraints in initiating an EAP course in 2010.

In total, twelve administrative personnel and teaching staff were contacted for interviews. Seven out of the twelve contacted people consented to give the interviews. Three of the interviewees were working as part of the administration as well as teaching staff of the Management Sciences Department. The rest of the four were members of the Humanities Department. One of the interviewees is the current administrative head of the Department, whereas two others were former administrative heads. The last remaining interviewee was an ESP teacher.

Auto-ethnography/reflective paper:

The first author wrote a reflective paper, also known as auto-ethnography, sharing her own experience as an ESP teacher.

All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. After transcription, the process of data analysis began by taking printouts of the transcriptions as well as the reflective paper and then making surface generalisation of the kind of data available (Kitwood, 1977). Then data reduction was carried out by making 'marginal remarks' (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to decide the relevance of the data to the research questions and interview schedule. The next step was 'categorisation of content' (Kitwood, 1977) based

on the research questions. These themes were then traced in all the interviews by marking chunks of relevant sentences. These themes were then placed under broader categories or headings to make the data manageable. This data condensation (Tesch, 1990 in Miles & Huberman, 1994) helped to draw conclusions. The open-ended question of the student questionnaire was analysed in a similar fashion.

Results and discussion

This section deals with the results of the analysis of the data along with discussion of their implications.

Views of stakeholders on MBA students' English language needs

Firstly, the views of all stakeholders on the English language needs are being presented to set the foundation of the results and their discussions.

The first is the view of the MBA students about their English language needs and proficiency levels on the major four language skills. Table 1 presents the responses of students about skills which they feel are most needed for themselves at the university level:

Most Important Skills	Percentage
Writing skills	56.6%
Speaking skills	77.8%
Reading skills	42.4%
Listening	45.2%
Grammar	53.3%
Any other	0.0%

Table 1: Students' evaluation of most important language skill at university

As shown by the table above, students considered speaking, writing and grammar skills to be the most needed, followed by listening and reading skills. It is interesting that reading

is rated as the least important skill despite the demand that higher education places on students in terms of reading academic material. This statistic may be an indicator that these students feel confident of their reading skills in the English language.

The responses of the students evaluating their level of proficiency at different language skills and specifically writing yielded interesting results. Around 50% students felt that they had a good command over writing skills, followed by a 32.3 % who believed that they had a satisfactory level of competence in writing in English (see Table 2).

Students' perception of their Writing Skills level	Percentage
Excellent	8.1 %
Good	48.5 %
Satisfactory	32.3 %
Poor	7.1 %
Uncertain	4.0 %

Table 2: Students' self evaluation of their writing skills

Coming to speaking skills (see Table 3), a little over half the (51.5%) students believed they possessed satisfactory speaking skills. This was again completely in contrast to the teachers' views about the students' speaking abilities in English language.

Students' perception of their Speaking Skills level	Percentage
Excellent	4.0 %
Good	22.2 %
Satisfactory	51.5 %
Poor	19.2 %
Uncertain	3.0 %

Table 3: Students' self evaluation of their speaking skills

A total of 56.6% students believed that they were good readers while 14.1% thought they were excellent readers.

Students' perception of their Reading Skills level	Percentage
Excellent	14.1 %
Good	56.6 %
Satisfactory	18.2 %
Poor	11.2 %
Uncertain	0.0 %

Table 4: Students' self evaluation of their reading skills

Students again seemed to have highly optimistic views about their listening skills as can be gauged from the following (Table 5).

Students' perception of their Listening Skills level	Percentage
Excellent	12.1 %
Good	40.4 %
Satisfactory	34.3 %
Poor	10.1 %
Uncertain	2.0 %

Table 5: Students' self evaluation of their listening skills

41.4% students felt they had a satisfactory grip over the grammar of the English language as reflected in the following table.

Students' perception of their Grammar level	Percentage
Excellent	6.1 %
Good	23.2 %
Satisfactory	41.4 %
Poor	23.2 %
Uncertain	6.0 %

Table 6 Students' perceptions of their grammar skills

According to all administrative personnel as well as the ESP teachers, the English language proficiency of MBA students 'is not up to mark' as is expected from Masters level students. Two of the three administrators interviewed from the Management Sciences Department and three of the five participants from the Humanities Department related their experiences with MBA students not even having enough English language proficiency to comprehend the lecture. As in the words of a former administrator and teaching staff from the Department of Management,

'in general case at comprehension is such a serious issue that I can never forget that particular example of a spelling when someone wrote cigarette as s-i-g-e-r-i-t'.

According to a former administrator of Department of Humanities, the students' command on 'English language to express them by their ideas fluently and accurately, are terribly lacking.' All ESP teachers highlighted the fact that most students have very weak basic structure of English language structure which is evident from their writing.

Two other participants from the Humanities Department shared their experiences of repeated requests from students to deliver the lecture or instructions in Urdu rather than English. This may indicate not only low English language proficiency but also poor listening skills.

Spoken English and presentation skills are one of the weakest areas which are also considered important by the students surveyed. Lack of proficiency in these skills is compounded by lack of confidence and no prior experience or exposure to speaking English with others - let alone present in front of a class full of students. This suggests that ESP teachers have to help students not only in the area of English language but have to help students with soft and transferrable skills to be able to help students.

The above discussion illustrates that the views of administrative staff as well as the ESP teachers regarding their English language proficiency are very different from those of their students. This clash in perceptions can have repercussions on motivation for students as well as teachers while learning and teaching.

Reasons for weak proficiency of students in English Language

Most of the interviewees suggested that the poor quality of English language teaching at college level in Pakistan is the basic reason for students with such low language skills. A former administrator of the Department of Management Sciences stated:

I think they are bringing a lot of baggage with them they clearly have not had proper English teaching. And the distinction between this can be easily understood if you see the performance of students who have done A levels and O levels as compared to those who have come from the other channel of language because in A or O level whether they are hard working or not at least comprehending the course is not an issue.

This view is verified by research conducted by Malik (1996), Rehman (2004), Mansoor (2005), Shamim (2006 & 2008) and Siddiqui (2012).

The current administrator of the Humanities Department expounds further on the same point by saying

for most part education (in Pakistan) is given at a superficial level with the end result that students that have a strong background tend to do well those who don't, don't get much support and they are disadvantaged over and over again.

This view is elaborated upon by Siddiqui (2012) where he critically examines the Pakistani education system. According to him (ibid) the Pakistani education system, instead of providing 'equal opportunity' and empowering the poor, is doing the exact opposite and thus needs a complete overhaul.

Is the course Business Communication fulfilling all language needs of MBA students?

Again, all seven interviewees, also recorded in the first author's auto-ethnography, believe that the maiden MBA English language course Business Communication Course is insufficient to cater for coaching needs of MBA student. This is mainly because of time constraints and the course not being fully relevant to the students' needs.

How can the English language needs of MBA students be fulfilled?

All three administrators from the Management Department believed that inclusion of another English language course in the MBA programme was not the right way to fulfil the needs of the students. In the view of one of the administrators, additional courses (non-credit bearing but compulsory) need to be designed and organized for MBA students

...these courses can be conducted in the summer time or when the students are selected to be part of the programme. They can be oriented with an extra – zero semester to groom them. Special workshops/courses need to be designed for students that are nearing graduation that is students in the 7th or 8th semesters so that when they go into the job market they know how to communicate and present themselves.

Another former administrator of Management Sciences Department and teaching staff goes even a step further suggesting that

If you really want a student to feel proficient in the language you need to have tests like TOEFL and who needs to be given special assistance in the language and for those students it should start from zero semester or zero-1 or zero-2 depending upon the kind of attention that students need... because just like when you go to Germany or France you have to spend a year or a year and a half to understand the language before they put you in to their professional course.

This view of the administrator echoes the models where students are assessed once they are admitted to university and provided instruction to enhance their English language proficiency, according to the assessment in the system as described by Read (2008). The idea of using an assessment rather than a high-stake test seems more appropriate to expound on the positive nature of the assessment.

In the views of two of the interviewees making the business communication course more practical and with indigenous case studies ‘coming from the experience or projects of the students’ could help the course manifold in worth and in making context sensitive. The views of developing indigenous case studies, material and research may lead to criticality and possibly transformative-pragmatic English for academic skills practices (Morgan 2009; Benesch 2001a & 2001b)

How do these views of the stakeholders help in finding a way to address the English Language needs of MBA students?

According to the views of the interviewees, the most possible way is to develop English language courses that start with a diagnostic test when students enter the university. This diagnostic test then needs to be used to make an estimate of how much extra coaching through pre-sessional courses may benefit the students with limited English and help them to gain a level of proficiency in English language where they can meet the minimum criteria of to cope with their academic needs .

In addition, students that are about to graduate from university, their skills need to be 'brushed-up' with CV clinics, interview skills and presentation skills workshops. These, according to the Management sciences department administrators, are possible ways forward.

The ESP teachers and administrative personnel from the Humanities Department suggested that the course outlines standardised in 2005 need to be 're-visited'. This course, as identified by the interviewees, lacks focus on grammar, basic sentence structure, and spoken skills.

Given the different perspectives of three stakeholders, an EAP/ ESP practitioner is faced with challenges despite a positive note of an administrator from Humanities:

I seriously and really believe that there is always a way to what you want. You just have to find the right path and you do that by analyzing the situation and the people you are working with.

The main challenge is that the administration may often not understand why the teaching faculty are suggesting recommendations as they, as an administrator said, are 'not on the ground, they are not even interacting with the students, they don't know them and they don't understand them'

A way forward towards receiving support from administrators may be as noted by another former administrator 'I think they should visit the classroom and see for themselves where do we need to improve...'

What to include in extra courses?

According to the data, based on both the student survey and the interviews, the following areas have been identified as essential elements of an ESP/ EAP course for the MBA programme:

1. Basic English for comprehension of lectures
2. Listening skills
3. Basic English construction (clear, grammatically correct sentences)
4. Spoken skills
5. Negotiation skills
6. Presentation skills

Writing in clear, understandable and grammatically correct language is another area that is seen to be a basic need. All but one (negotiation skills) areas identified in this research as ones needing extra attention for MBA students were also highlighted as problem areas in the needs analysis conducted in 2010 (Mansur 2010a).

Conclusion and global implications

Despite the deadlock experienced after the needs analysis in 2010, this research indicates that there is some possibility of getting some institutional support for developing a more responsive EAP course to MBA students' emerging needs. This study shows that EAP practitioners encounter formidable challenges if they are not careful enough to include all stakeholders involved in the needs analysis process. Inclusion of administrators in this process has emerged as one of the most important factors so that EAP practitioners are not met with hostility when implementing the course. It is especially important to find ways to engage (Fowler & Gilfillan, 2003; Yarrow, Robson & Owen, 2004; Moore, Tami, Asay, Sylvia & Curry, Beverly, 2006) all stakeholders in 'negotiating' (Salas, Mercado, Ouedraogo & Musetti, 2013) the process of curricula development and implementation (AASHE, 2010) at higher education level in contexts like Pakistan where power relations are delicately balanced which may have serious implications for both students and EAP professionals.

At the time of writing this chapter, the new EAP/ ESP course based on the findings had not been designed and thus, following this exploratory study we propose the following which may be applicable to other similar EAP/ ESP contexts in the world where English is the medium of higher education despite the language being a foreign language or lingua franca:

A diagnostic assessment of student needs should be carried out when they first enter university. Similar recommendations (e.g., an English language proficiency test like IELTS have been made by Mansoor (2005, p 361). This will help to identify those students who may be at risk of failing their studies due to limited English language skills early on. This assessment needs to be the basis of earmarking students for extra coaching in the various English language skills. The focus of skills should be driven by students' needs identified by the diagnostic assessment.

The university can offer a pre-sessional English language course to those students who come from non-English medium education colleges/ schools prior to their first semester. Such an offering could be credit-bearing as well. In addition, it is important to provide in-semester English language support mechanism that may be non-credited but compulsory for students to start their degree programs. This support may be available to all students as academic disciplines have their own academic practices and thus may be new to even those students who come from English medium education. In fact, a similar recommendation was made by Mansoor (2005, p.361). By doing so, the institution may be able to improve its retention and attainment figures given the fact that language is a key barrier to students' success.

Additionally, if resources allow, extra and specialised courses for graduating students need to be conducted to brush up their skills. Such extra courses need to focus on employability skills (e.g., interview skills, negotiation skills, etc.) that involve the use of English language. If necessary, such courses can integrate local or national languages too, thus promoting multilingual education in higher education and in students' professional development.

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Author biography

Saba Mansur is an Assistant Professor at the Humanities Department COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, Islamabad, Pakistan, and has over ten years' experience of teaching ESP courses at university level as well as over four years of teacher education experience. She earned her Master's in TESOL from the University of Leeds on the British Council's Hornby Scholarship.

Dr Prithvi Shrestha is Lecturer in ELT at The Open University, UK. He has published a number of books, book chapters and refereed journal articles in the areas of EAP, ESP and mobile language learning and teaching. He is currently a Joint Coordinator of the IATEFL ESP SIG.